

Death of a Rebel Base

The armored compartment swayed rhythmically from side to side as the AT-AT walker crashed through the bushes and scrub surrounding the Rebel base. Inside, the stormtroopers clutched their blaster rifles and calmly waited for the walker to reach its position. Outside, blaster fire filled the air. Occasionally, a bolt found its mark, sending echoes through the giant mechanical beast before bouncing heavily off its armored sides.

The giant walker shuddered, the rhythm of its stride momentarily broken as its huge leg crashed through a low lying building. Abandoning their medium repeating blaster, a group of Rebel defenders desperately flung themselves out of the way as the walker continued its advance. Most didn't get very far as the walker's head spat brilliant orange and yellow death onto them.

From the cockpit of the Imperial walker, Commander Hayvlin surveyed the fleeing Rebels and thumbed open the comlink. "Commence ground assault."

Slowly the walker came to a halt. Its head turning from side to side as it continued to fire at the Rebel troops. With a grating of gears, it lurched slightly as its legs bent, lowering its huge body onto the ground. Its rear hatch shot open and a ramp sped down to the ground.

Armored feet clattered against the metal ramp as stormtroopers rushed out of the walker.

Rebel blaster fire lifted the first three stormtroopers into the air and flung them against the sides of the walker. But it did nothing to slow the stormtroopers behind them. They charged down the ramp, their blaster fire scattering the Rebels before more shots could be exchanged. One Rebel attempted to toss a grenade into the advancing armored figures. Before he could throw it, his body lay smoking on the ground.

The stormtroopers spread out. Groups moved to the front of the walker to form a perimeter with other stormtroopers dismounting from nearby walkers. Other groups moved toward the entrance to the underground base. Using destroyed blaster cannons, rocks and brush for cover, the stormtroopers advanced, driving the Rebels before them.

Before long, no Rebels remained alive above the ground. Only white and black armored figures moved next to the base's metal doors. "They've closed the blast doors. Send in a cutting team," ordered the assault commander.

Inside the base, Rebels crouched nervously in the corridor, their blasters held ready to fire. Lights blazed over the armored doors as the stormtroopers cut their way in. A loud clang echoed through the corridor as the blast doors fell inward. Silence, and then searing beams of light sped down the corridor.

Chunks of rock and metal shot through the air as blaster bolts hit walls and machinery. Six stormtroopers were cut down as they rushed through the freshly-sliced opening. But their bodies were crushed underfoot as more stormtroopers poured into the base. They began to inexorably move down the corridor. Rebel blaster bolts found their marks, scattering stormtroopers right and left, but the Rebel defenders were not escaping unscathed.

Even though their dead were beginning to pile high in the corridors, the stormtroopers rapidly pushed the defenders back. The Rebels moved deeper into the base's tunnels, heading for their only hope of escape -- a concealed hangar exit at the rear of the base.

The stormtroopers followed, spreading quickly through the base, taking no prisoners. The Empire was involved in a punitive strike, and the stormtroopers had their orders: reach the shield generator and destroy it, then form a perimeter around the area to contain Rebel troops while the Star Destroyer *Avenger* obliterates the base from the face of the planet.

A heavy repeat blaster fired down the corridor, pinning the crouching stormtroopers and buying the Rebel technicians time to maneuver the remaining airspeeders into position. The blast doors opened as the Rebels abandoned the heavy blaster and ran for the rising speeders. The first airspeeder shot out of the base, only to instantly explode. The other airspeeders were already on their way out. Unable to stop in the confines of the exit, they ran right into the combined firepower of the four AT-ATs and their stormtrooper contingents waiting outside. As the last speeder erupted into flame, the stormtroopers rushed into the base and joined with those inside.

High above the planet, the Star Destroyer *Avenger* was turning the Rebel base into slag metal. Blasts of high powered laser energy leaped from the vessel to the planet's surface. As the bombardment subsided, a gray-uniformed figure strode confidently onto *Avenger's* bridge. Captain Ferdas looked up from his instruments and

acknowledged the newcomer's presence. "You have done well, Commander Hayvlin. Lord Vader will be pleased."

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